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T H E

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EVERY now and then the vagaries of certain learned biblical scholars cause a kind of reaction against the profoundest study of the Scriptures. Men say "It seems impossible to study the Bible without running away on some hobby. Is not the common man's idea and use of the Bible about as sound and as true as the scholar's? What do the learned professors accomplish beyond stirring up quarrels and, perhaps, settling, for a generation, a few, often minor, points?" Others go farther and extol the insight of an ignorant but devout piety. They emphasize the biblical teachings of the Spirit's guidance into the Divine knowledge, saying, for example, "the Author of Scripture stands beside the meanest and most ignorant of His students, ready to lead them into all the truth." If so, what need of Bible scholars, indeed?

One cannot but sympathize sometimes with the advocates of such sentiments. Wrong-headed scholars do exist even in the biblical world, crotchety theorists, quixotic fighters of windmills, guerillas who prey upon cherished beliefs with a kind of grim satisfaction. We are tempted to say, "Give us ignorant faith rather than enlightened crankiness if we must choose between them in the interpretation of the Scriptures," though both have developed, at times, practices which have astonished and even horrified the world. Still it will be granted in the matter of practical interpretation that one would rather be ruled by a Calvin than by a Münzer. Other things being equal, the devout scholar is a safer guide than the devout ignoramus. If pious illiteracy is a good commentator, pious intelligence and scholarship are better; and want of mental training or of the niceties of literary or scien-

tific method do not assure the Bible reader against follies of doctrine or practice.

IT WOULD be very gratifying to many biblical students if the friends of the "Higher Criticism" were as sure as are all its enemies of the opinion which the Author of Scripture cherishes concerning it. They do not seem to be so clear on this particular point. They are not given to pierce so deeply, possibly, into the counsels of the Almighty as are they who see in this engine and those who employ it a force against which His anathema is promulgated. The observer of the conflict may well bear this in mind, however, that no authentic revelation in this especial matter has as yet been received. But it may well be emphasized that in the larger field of divine revelation one thing is clear. It is that God has set His approval clearly and unmistakably upon *the search for His truth*. Men may not find it. They may not have the best instruments for its discovery. But the honest and sincere endeavor to find it, by whatever means sought, can never meet His disapproval. If this is the spirit and aim of the "Higher Critics" or of any students of the Bible they may be sure that in motive and purpose at least they are in line with the Divine will. They are liable to mistakes and errors. They may have gone far astray. Their sincerity of purpose would not necessarily restrain them from wrong paths. But so far as they do desire to bring the truth to light, they are in harmony with the revealed will of God. It is well to hold clearly before us this essential fact which will be a fact when "critics" and their enemies have together disappeared. Is the student of the Scriptures, of whatever school, studying to know the Truth and to make the Truth prevail? That is the supreme question. Beside it all other questions are insignificant.

A GREAT movement of scholarship is setting toward the field of religious history. Religions are undergoing investigation. They are drawn out of their dusty retirement in the past. They are called out from the seats of their influence in the present. Their facts, their doctrines, their histories

are examined and analyzed. A great mass of information has been collected and in part classified. Students have begun to compare facts, to draw inferences and to lay down conclusions. A new science is born. The relations of religions other than Christianity to the facts and doctrines of the Gospel of Christ meet the student at the threshold of his inquiry. They are very close and very important. The truth is that much which has been thought unique and essential in the latter has been found, on closer study, to exist sometimes in germ, sometimes in full development, in other religions. Wonderful resemblances, not merely chance similarities of language or of isolated sentences and ideas, but in the case of important doctrines and practices, present themselves to the investigator. Such facts call for explanation and adjustment with our current notions of the uniqueness of the Gospel.

There are two diametrically opposed explanations which gather up into themselves many forms of statement and methods of explication that can in reality be ranged under the one or the other. The first explanation has long held sway among us. According to it, the likeness of these other religions to Christianity are due to evil, to satanic influence and activity. In the case of so essential a fact as religion the powers of darkness must needs seek to delude and ensnare men's souls by a falsification of the truth, a wicked and damning imitation of the real and saving institution which God has revealed. In this exercise of devilish ingenuity heathen religions have had their origin and by as much as they more closely resemble Christianity, by so much more is their influence destructive. The many beauties which gleam here and there in these faiths are only false lights which draw away the unwary to trust in a lie. The few examples of noble living which seem to belong to these systems of truth and to have grown up in vital connection with them are either to be similarly regarded or have come into being in spite of their environment. Often in both cases, the beauties of thought and the nobilities of life, are found to be immensely overrated or to be so isolated as to be practically insignificant. In behalf of this general estimate of heathen faiths many things may be urged. The failure of these sys-

tems to produce a general and permanent moral and spiritual uplift; the terrible moral degeneracy of the mass of heathen nations at the time of Christ's advent; the apparent inability on the part of present non-Christian religions to elevate their adherents to a high moral plane; above all, the definite and tremendous denunciations of the Old Testament prophets leveled against the faiths of their own day outside of Israel, faiths in which they saw neither light nor life, but only an idolatry which was from beneath and could work nothing else than ruin:—these are some of the strong points urged in favor of this position.

The second explanation of these resemblances between Christianity and other religions is the outcropping of that fundamental religious element in the human spirit which leads him from the beginning, from the ends of the earth, in Egypt, in Babylonia, in Kaffir land, in Peru as well as in Jerusalem, to feel the need of communion and reconciliation with the Power above and to employ means to effect these blessed results. All religions are from God as man's spirit is from God and, as the human soul manifests itself in similar forms amid an immense variety of circumstances and with differences due to environment, so the religious spirit of man works out identities in the midst of varieties. The advocates of this general view differ widely among themselves in its particular applications. Some would range Christianity along side of other religions as only a step removed, if indeed so much as that, or at least as differing from them in degree merely, not in kind. Others would grant the very highest possible place to these religions, but find for the Gospel a unique place. Some of the most devout and thoughtful of these investigators have found in the position of Jesus Christ in Christianity, in the emphasis placed upon His person and His influence, the determining and unique element. They would allow willingly and gladly a very close resemblance between the doctrines and practices of Christianity and those of other religious systems, but find in Jesus Christ and his place in the Gospel the surpassing, the supreme element, in the religious evolution of humanity. Many of them would hold that here the religion of Christ stands not only above but apart from all other faiths.

The student may not be inclined to accept either of these views, so far as they are theories. The field of religious facts is being worked over to-day in a thorough way which is to afford ground in the near future for a more decisive estimate of this whole question. One thing is growing clearer—that Christianity and other faiths have much more in common than was ever before supposed. If these common features are developed and made more clear—supposed resemblances which exist only in the imagination of the student or on the surface of the subject being removed,—the question will then present itself more and more definitely to every thinking man—which of the two theories that explain these common features of the religions of the world is most in harmony with the facts? Are the conditions and characteristics of the phenomena such as to make the explanation of satanic agency invalid? Is the likeness so close as to endanger the uniqueness of Christianity? Is there that in the person and power of Jesus Christ which sets the Gospel above and aside from all other religious foundations and, in making Him the Heart of Christianity, makes Him also forever the Life and Light of the world?